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One of the many services offered by the CANADIAN FILM INSTITUTE is that provided by our INFORMATION division. Through our catalogues, publications and the BULLETIN (which you are now reading), we attempt to generate an awareness of film and film usage on a national and international plane. With this thought in mine, we are pleased to relate an historic report submitted by an early Canadian film pioneer and member of the Institute, R. BARCLAY SHAW, now residing in Victoria, British Columbia.

As we begin this, our SECOND YEAR OF PUBLICATION, it is a fitting tribute to Mr. Shaw, that we print his "reminiscences" (with his permission) that make up a most vital chapter in CANADIAN FILM HISTORY.

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EDUCATIONAL FILM REMINISCENCES (1926 - 1940)

by

R. Barclay Shaw

In our democratic society, especially in the realm of education and culture, health and welfare, we believe that responsible citizens with public-spirited motivations should periodically give expression to their opinions, some of which may be in the form of constructive criticisms or helpful suggestions.

As early as 1926, in the U S.A. and in the United Kingdom, some 16mm films had been experimentally used as teaching aids in several academic centres with apparent success. However, Canadian educators, with a conventional regidity and lacking initiative, were very slow to recognize the potential uses and scope of 16mm educational-cultural films. There was an obvious reluctance by academic authorities and school trustees to deviate from the "traditional."

There was violent opposition to any films being shown in a school classroom or academic auditorium. "They would be distracting, and would constitute new diversified forms of entertainment. No 'movies' involving darkened Canadian classrooms will be considered!" was a leading school board chairman's comment in a Toronto press review of my public reference to the film potential.

In 1927, as an ex-Canadian Army and Royal Flying Corps combat officer, somewhat bored by commercial aircraft agency efforts, but fortunately economically independent, it became quickly evident to me that there was a pioneering opportunity to voluntarily introduce and promote 16mm non-theatrical films of merit in Canada.

I formed a DOMINION EDUCATIONAL FILM ASSOCIATION in cooperation with interested University of Toronto faculty members and a few other public-spirited, responsible citizens identified with the Royal Empire (now "Commonwealth") Society, National Council of Education, etc. The Association was later incorporated without share capital under the Canadian Companies/Societies Act, and without any provision for membership support.

The fundamental principles and aims were to promote and facilitate the circulation of suitable 16mm educational films on a strictly "non-profit" basis, in schools and universities as "teaching aids," and in the public auditoria as educational-cultural feature films, plus documentaries.

The 16mm educational or instructional film appeared to have extraordinary scope. There was need for a central Canadian "clearing house" of information, plus voluntary action Much evidence of apathy, conservative opposition and skepticism remained. My immediate concern was to obtain suitable "specimen" films from reputable sources for necessary voluntary demonstrations. A visit to the Eastman Teaching Films Branch of the Eastman Kodak Company (Rochester, N.Y.) and correspondence with Gaumont-British Films Ltd. of London, England, quickly brought the most gratifying results.

Associated Screen News Ltd. (Montreal & Toronto), a subsidiary photographic unit of the Canadian Pacific Railway, following the aforesaid voluntary demonstrations, "grabbed" an agency contract with Gaumont-British Films Ltd., starting with the immediate sale of excellent 16mm film series on biology, to the Biological Department of the University of Toronto, headed by Dr. A. G. Huntsman. Other film acceptances quickly followed The old and incompetant Ontario Government Motion Picture Bureau and its 28mm (French) policy were not compatible with the new 16mm film movement. By request of the Ontario Government, I prepared and submitted a comprehensive report which resulted in the abolition of the aforementioned Bureau and the end of the 28mm "foreign" complexities.

The 16mm educational film movement and the organizing and coordinating interests had been given the necessary momentum long before the start of World War II. Our non-profit Association had also concentrated on efforts to facilitate the circulation of suitable British Commonwealth 16mm films of exceptional education and inspirational values.

Among the large number of films in that category, and which were given my personal attention:

1. "Royal Remembrances" (from Queen Victoria to Edward VIII. Original film in the British Museum, London)

2. "Scott South Pole Expedition" (the original Ponting Film)

3. British Admiralty films of World War I operations of the British Navy: by special permission.

These historic documentary films, among others, were screened to large and appreciative audiences with neither "admission fees" or "collections." It was my privilege and honour to voluntarily screen "Royal Remembrance" (1½ hrs.) to the Bessboroughs and later, to the Tweedsmuirs at Government House (Rideau Hall) in Ottawa.

The Dominion Educational Film Association was disbanded in 1940. The National Film Board was formed in 1939 (the Canadian Film Institute - then known as the National Film Society, 1935). Countless 16mm films had been "discovered" and made available, enabling many Canadians to formulate new, satisfying philosophies with a sense of new values in the realms of education and culture. The processes had been considerably accelerated by the earlier years of voluntary introductory efforts in Canadian centres.

In retrospect, it was a public-spirited challenge and in a sense, a pioneering service which penetrated some traditional academic barriers. With appreciation of "responsibilities in citizenship", it proved gratifying to me and my helpful associates, because it was a purely voluntary service, "for the good of the cause" and has, therefore, remained a pleasant memory.

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DAVID M. EISENSTADT